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Knox City Council

Domestic Animal Management Plan

Engagement Summary Report
Phase 2 - December 2021



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Executive Summary

Preparing a Domestic Animal Management Plan

The Victorian *Domestic Animal Act 1994* requires every Victorian Council to prepare a Domestic Animal Management Plan, outlining how it will manage dogs and cats within its municipal boundaries. This Plan is renewed every four years.

The Knox City Council Domestic Animal Management Plan (DAMP) details Council's strategies for the management of dogs and cats, including providing education to the community, promoting responsible pet ownership, and protection of the community and environment from nuisance dogs and cats. The DAMP also outlines how Council will enforce all legislative requirements and compliance with our local laws.

Community Engagement approach

The community engagement approach for the development of Council's DAMP includes two rounds of community engagement:

- Phase 1 – consultation to gather feedback from a broad range of stakeholders on their feedback on the current 2017-2021 DAMP, and ideas for the next DAMP (2nd July – 1st August 2021); and
- Phase 2 – consultation to gather feedback on the draft DAMP (28th October – 28th November 2021).

During the Phase 1 of engagement, we wanted to hear from our community their feedback on how dogs and cats are managed in the Knox municipality, including feedback on Council's animal management services and suggestions on what could be improved. The feedback from this community consultation, together with feedback from other stakeholders and benchmarking of how other Councils manage cats and dogs, will inform the preparation of the draft 2021-2025 DAMP.

The Phase 1 of engagement ran from 2nd July to 1 August 2021 (31 days), and offered the following ways to engage primarily via Council's *Have Your Say* website, by:

- Survey – for community members/ residents (Appendix 1)
- Survey – for businesses who work with cats and dogs, including animal welfare organisations

For those unable to access Council's online options, consultation was offered to receive feedback via:

- Request a one-on-one consultation (in lieu of drop-in sessions or community meetings – due to COVID)
- Provide a submission/ feedback – via email, mail (postage paid) or to Council's customer service centre.

A total of 3,317 responses were received from the community and businesses. The outcomes from the phase 1 community engagement are available in the **Community Engagement Summary Report – Phase 1 – August 2021** at <https://haveyoursay.knox.vic.gov.au/dogs-and-cats>

The community feedback from the Phase 1 engagement informed the development of the draft 2021-2025 DAMP, which was approved by the Council at the 25th October 2021 Council meeting – to be released for exhibition, community consultation and invited submissions/ feedback on the draft Plan.

The Phase 2 of engagement ran from 28th October to 28th November 2021 (32 days), and offered the following ways to engage primarily via Council's *Have Your Say* website, by:

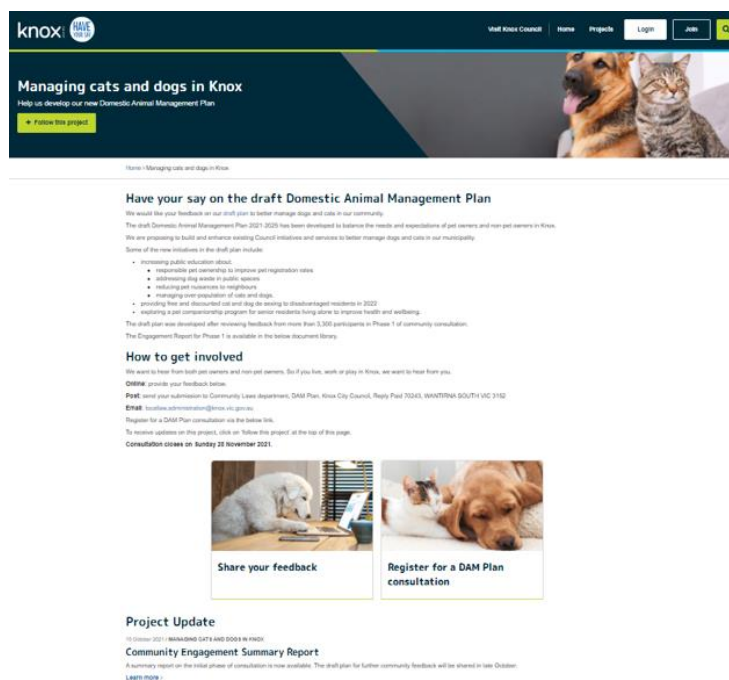
- Provide a submission/ feedback in the online form or upload your submission
- Provide a submission/ feedback via email, mail (postage paid) or to Council's customer service centre
- Request a one-on-one consultation (in lieu of drop-in sessions or community meetings – due to COVID).

The audience for Phase 2 of the engagement was:

- Registered cat and dog owners (approximately 7,000 registered cats and 19,000 registered dogs in Knox, which is around 1/3 of Knox households)
- Unregistered cat and dog owners
- People interested in animal welfare
- People concerned about animal nuisance / people who have made complaints in the past 12 months
- Users of our public spaces which includes off-lead parks and reserves
- Non-pet owner residents
- People that engaged in the Phase 1 of the Domestic Animal Management Plan Consultation (Phase 1, we invited business owners of domestic animal businesses, and local community groups).

The Phase 2 engagement was promoted via a range of Council's community channels, including:

- News articles (2) on Council's website home-page
- A3-sized coreflute signs installed in 50 key parks across the municipality (pictured)
- SMS message sent to over 95% of registered cat and dog owners in the municipality, being over 18,600 pet owners (that have provided Council with a mobile phone contact number)
- News articles (2) in Knox's e-Newsletter on 3rd and 24th November 2021
- Facebook advertisement
- Direct emails to those who engaged in the Phase 1 of the Domestic Animal Management Plan Consultation (and requested to be kept informed on the progress of the 2021-2025 Plan).



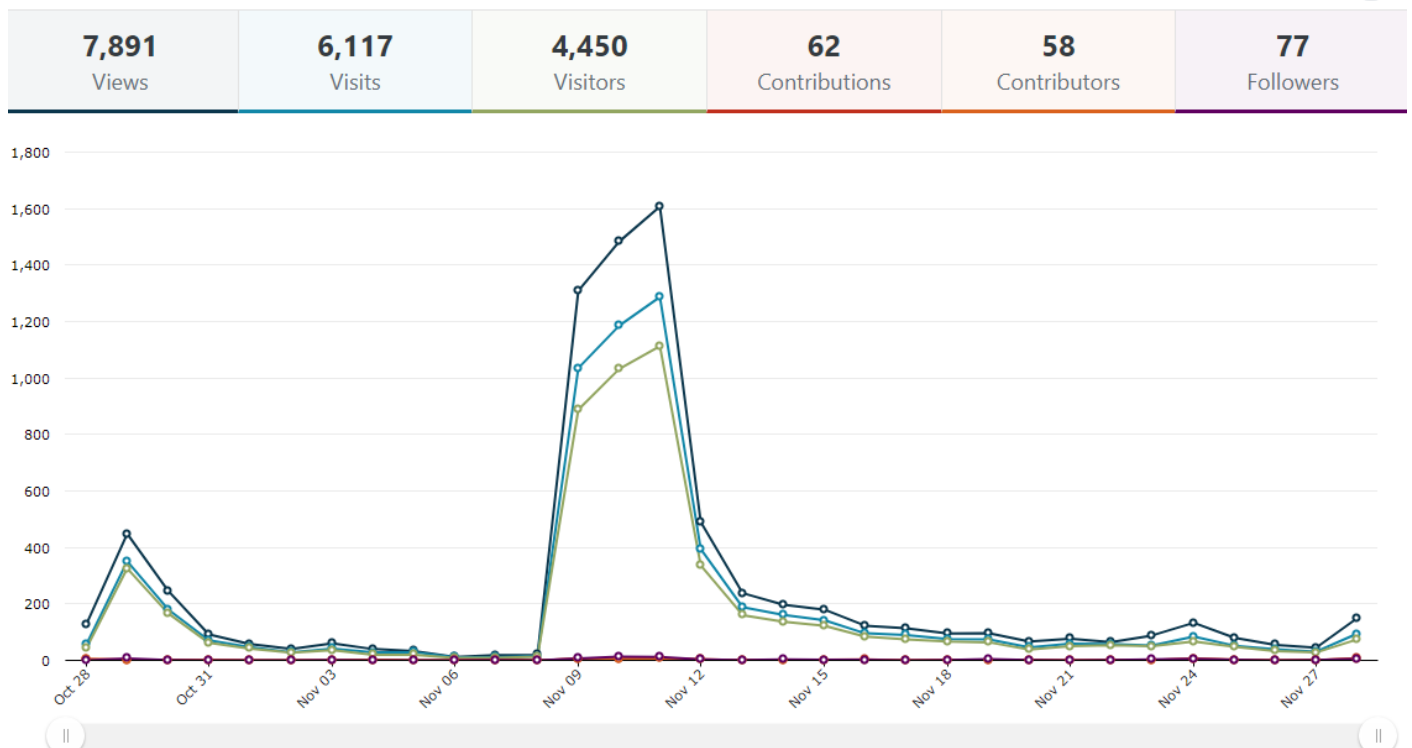
Summary of engagement findings - Phase 2

At the 25th October 2021 meeting of Council, approval was provided to release the draft 2021-2025 Domestic Animal Management Plan for public consultation for the period 28th October to 28th November 2021. A total of 111 responses were received from the community, including a submission from the Animal Justice Party, through the following channels:

Engagement activity	Responses
Online submissions/ feedback	57
Email submissions/ feedback	50
One-on-one consultations (on request)	4

The following graph shows the number of visits/ views and contributions made during the Phase 2 consultation period on the dedicated **“Managing Cats and Dogs in Knox”** webpage on Council’s Have You Say community engagement website haveyoursay.knox.vic.gov.au/dogs-and-cats. Note the peak submission spike shown in the graph below corresponds with the sending of SMS messages to registered cat and dog owners – inviting their participation in this consultation.

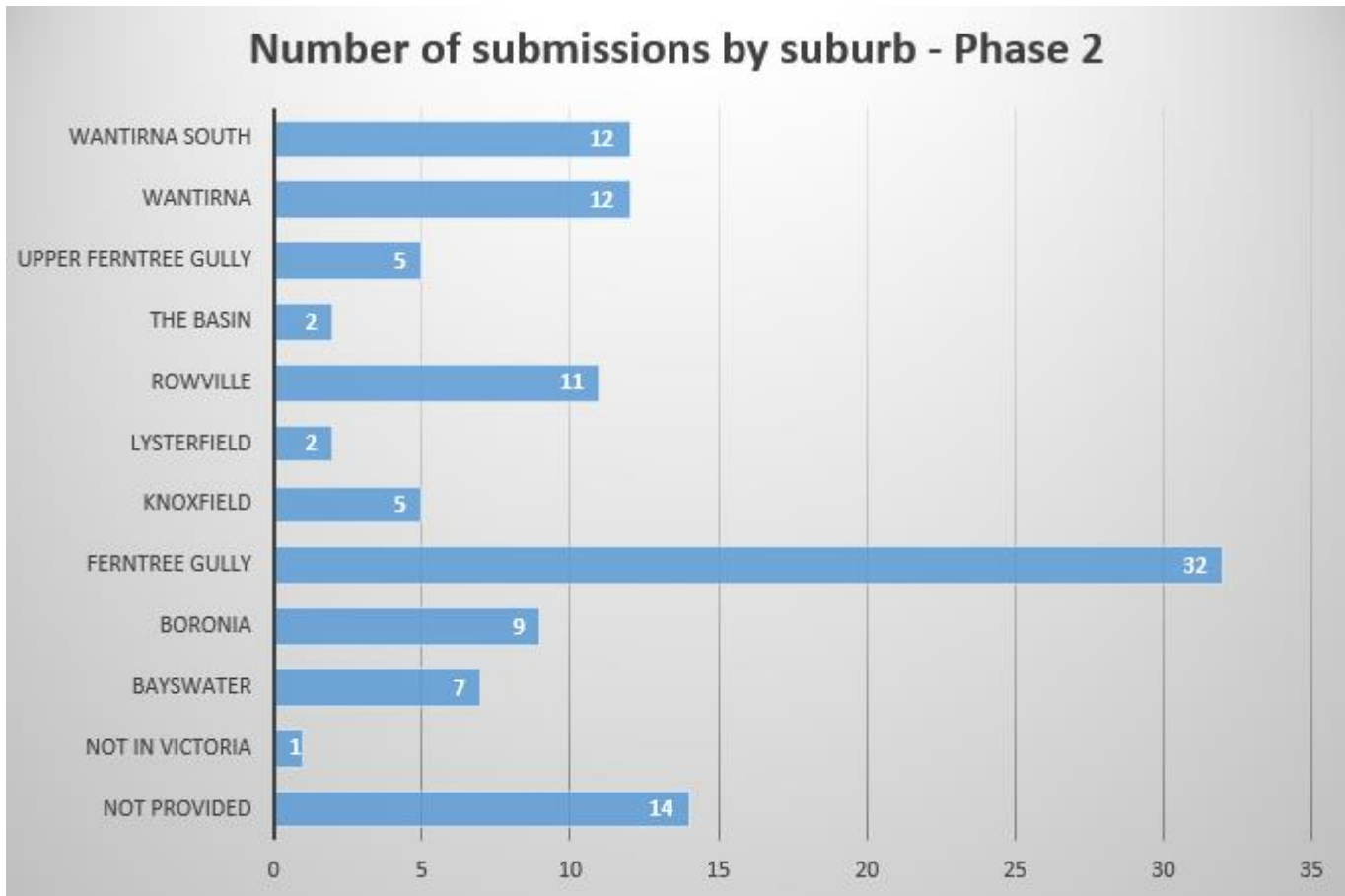
Performance Summary



Engagement findings – Phase 2

Who we heard from

The graph below shows the breakdown of the 111 submissions provided in the Phase 2 community consultation by suburb. One submitter indicated they did not reside in Victoria, and 14 submitters could not be identified as residents of Knox.



Summary of responses

Over 65% of the responses (73 of 111) provided during the phase 2 consultation were submissions regarding opposition to the introduction of a 24 hour cat curfew in Knox. 4 submissions were received in support of the 24 hour cat curfew. 33 submissions were received from community members on a range of issues relating to the keeping of cats and dogs, including feedback regarding: dogs off leash and dog parks in Knox, barking dogs, dog waste not being picked up, animal cruelty and welfare, pet registration, reuniting of lost animals and the de-sexing of dogs and cats. The feedback and suggestions provided in these submissions are summarised by topic, with suggestions highlighted in blue shaded boxes throughout this report.

A submission was also received from the Animal Justice Party, outlining a range of initiatives they would like to see in all Council's DAM Plans. The submission was not specific to Knox Council's DAM, and a large number of the suggested initiatives are current initiatives in the current DAM (and proposed in draft 2021-2025 DAM).

24 hour cat curfew - opposition

A large proportion (73 of the 111 submissions) received during the Phase 2 consultation period were opposed to the 24 hour cat curfew, planned to commence on 10 April 2022. 20 of these submissions specifically indicated that they were supportive of a sunset to sunrise/ night-time curfew arrangement.

The concerns raised regarding a 24 hour cat curfew submitted during the Phase 2 consultation on the draft DAMP primarily related to:

- Financial burden/ costly to modify fences or purchase enclosures to keep cats contained to the property
- Inability for renters, seniors and low-income earners to modify the property to contain their cat
- Anxiety/ stress on the cats (especially older cats) and associated negative impacts of being contained (ie. Spraying, behavioural changes, more cleaning products and kitty litter costs)
- Anxiety/ stress on pet owners – already experiencing stresses of COVID-19
- Increased number of cats being surrendered or dumped due to this decision, and will increase the euthanasia of cats as people won't be inclined to want to own a cat in Knox.
- Increased dumped/ abandoned cats will create more stray nuisance cats and wildlife being hunted.
- Cancelling their cat's registration or expect a large decrease in the cat registration fee – if their cat can't leave their home
- Cats are not the only ones killing local wildlife – dogs, cars, urban development reducing wildlife corridors.
- Cat nuisance issues and cat impoundment numbers for Knox have been trending down since 2012, so the data does not support the need for a 24 hour curfew
- Council has not presented data on the predation impacts of registered domestic cats. If feline predation is an issue, then trapping cats that enter sensitive environmental areas may be more effective.
- Phase 1 engagement survey response data shows minor nuisance to neighbours from cats, which does not support the impact and cost of requiring owners to cage/ fence their properties
- Loss of companionship that cats provide to not only their owners/ families but to neighbours who enjoy cats visiting their property (especially the elderly)
- Cats are very good climbers and will be very difficult to contain.
- The requirement to erect ugly wire enclosures and barriers on the fencing will decrease property values for cat owners.
- May result in decreased cat de-sexing and cat microchipping, due to no incentive to undertake these activities required for cat registration.
- Cats are crepuscular in their activity, and as such, mostly hunting activities occur in the twilight just before dawn and just after sunset. Cats are not as domesticated as dogs, and many develop anxiety-related behavioral and medical issues when not allowed some freedom of movement.
- The practice of locking cats up indoors is unhealthy and unhygienic for both animal and owners.
- Many owners will have to lock their cats up in dark sheds 24/7 or put their beloved family members to sleep.
- The curfew will cause great division amongst neighbours who don't like cats.
- There will be family issues/ blame/ emotional stress when the cat sneaks out, and the subsequent fines.
- Containment of cats at all times is cruel – especially for those who have been free to roam their whole lives
- Council did not advertise the proposed law of 24-hour curfew before voting upon it. There was no community engagement on the 24 hour cat curfew.
- Knox Council has bias/ discrimination against cats – unlike dogs who are allowed off lead free-to-run in most parks in Knox, Council provides dog parks, dogs attack and cause the majority of nuisance issues.
- Other Councils (like Frankston) have back-flipped on a cat curfew.
- Concern with the KnoxNews article interviewing Mark Menze (CEO Animal Aid) regarding the curfew.

Some of the direct quotes provided by respondents that capture the sentiment of the opposition to the 24 hour cat curfew submitted during the Phase 2 consultation on the draft DAMP include:

"Imagine your life as a cat after 10 April 2022 - the closest to outside would be look out a window, and the only fresh air you breathe would be through a mesh of a fly screen or security door."

"Our cat has only known the outdoors and to stop him from enjoying nature and the outdoors would not only be detrimental to his well being but would cause great stress to our family!"

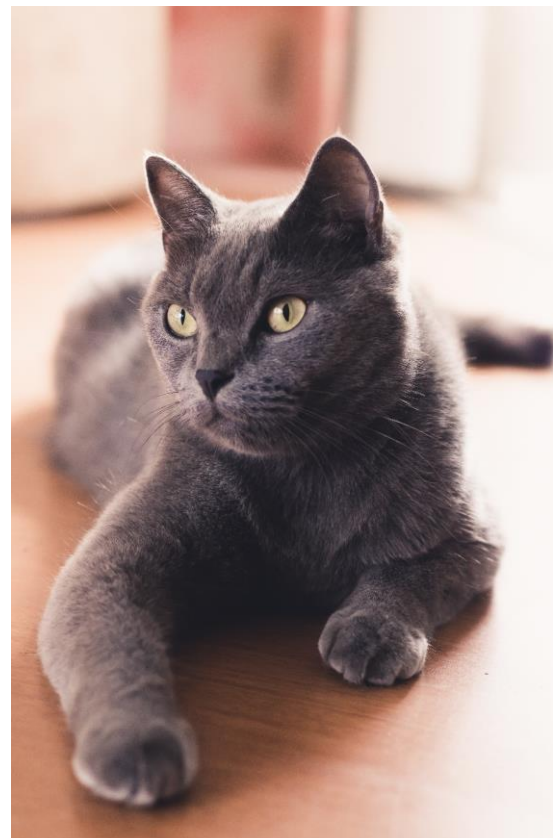
"Registered cats who are kept in from dawn to dusk – a curfew that we actually support - sleep for the majority of the day and have very little opportunity or ability to prey on wildlife."

"We are looking to install a catio to our home, which will cost us close to \$5,000 (as we have 2 cats) and as we aren't handy or knowledgeable to build a safe secure one ourselves - I hope that Knox Council is able to help people subsidise the cost of new cat enclosures."

"It is impractical and cost prohibitive to install devices on our boundary fences to stop our cats jumping over them, as that entails 600 metres of fencing. It is also impossible to stop our cats from crawling under our fences as the ground is undulating so the space between the ground and the bottom of our fence varies throughout the 600 metres of fencing."

"In the past two years as a result of the COVID - 19 pandemic we have felt for ourselves the impact on our health and well - being lockdowns have imposed on us; what you are proposing will have the same cruel effect on our cats. We should be above this and have the decency and compassion to ensure our animals lead as full a life as we would wish for ourselves. Many of the other measures you are proposing are eminently sensible, but, incarcerating our pets is not one of them."

"My mother is very distressed about this because she adopted two cats more than 10 years ago, both were recommended to be OUTDOOR cats by RSPCA and Animal Protection Society. They have lived their whole lives outdoors and are only locked up in separate small enclosures at night as per night curfew. My mum is very poor and cannot afford an outdoor enclosure big enough to house these two cats. They cannot be in the house together as they fight. The tiny enclosures that they go in at night are not suitable for locking them up 24/7 in. She has a big backyard and front yard which they spend most of their time in. She has done everything that a responsible cat owner does and now she will have to put them to sleep. She needs her cats and this will really affect her mental health in many ways that you can possibly imagine."



"Disappointed that the Council wants to have domestic cats locked in & as cannot afford to have back-yard covered in, will be selling property & moving to another area."

"Older cats used to being outside will struggle with this new curfew and suffer anxiety problems and drive their owners crazy with trying to escape and get out."

"My landlord won't let me put an enclosure in the yard, which makes the curfew doubly hard."

"The curfew is over the top and will greatly impact the elderly and a number of people whom rely on these animals for companionship. For a lot of people it's actually not that they have their own animals but have neighbors whom do and as example a cat whom would visit those neighbors. I know of multiple examples where that happens and brings joy to those people, my mum whom lives in Wantirna South is one of them."

"To lock my 11 year old cat indoors is cruel. He currently stays in at night but likes to wander across to the neighbours garden during the day. I am unable to afford a cage and feel my only way is to surrender my cat and cancel my registration. This proposition is absolutely disgraceful and will cause great division amongst neighbours who don't like cats. I am sick and tired of my council not listening to their ratepayers".

"Cats are more than simply pets for most owners they are comforters and companions and in many households are treated as family members entitled to enjoy the same privileges as any other family member. The implications of introducing what effectively will be a 24 hour curfew should not be underestimated. It will most certainly lead in the long term to a massive fall in cat numbers as potential owners will be both reticent to either purchase or adopt animals and more will be euthanised."

"We all agree that our wildlife needs to be protected and nuisance cats need to be controlled. There is no guarantee that a 24 hour curfew will stop cats hunting and there's certainly no guarantee that stray cats and poorly monitored cats won't continue to trespass. We can guarantee that a 24 hour curfew will place a great deal of stress and anxiety on households like ours. We need to compromise with all stakeholders".

The suggestions provided for amendments to the 24 hour cat curfew were to:

- Remove/ scrap the 24 hour curfew
- Replace the 24 hour curfew with a sunset to sunrise/ night-time curfew
- Amend the conditions to apply the 24 hour curfew only to newly registered cats – not existing cats (providing for a staged implementation over approx. the next 10 years, to remove the cost burden)
- Senior cats should be exempt from the 24 hour curfew and should be inside dusk till dawn (identified by perhaps a fluoro cat tag so senior cats can be easily identified)
- Provide financial support for the installation of cat barriers/ enclosures
- Provide mediation of neighbour discussions with nuisance cats
- Investigate GPS capabilities for owners to monitor their cats
- Enforce all cat owners to register cats, and use these funds for GPS and cat enclosure subsidies
- Enforce all registered cats to be de-sexed, microchipped, vaccinated and wear collars with bells
- Provide DIY instructions to make it as easy & affordable for building/ installing enclosures/ fencing
- Undertake community engagement on the curfew.

24 hour cat curfew - support

4 submissions received during the Phase 2 consultation period were in support of the 24 hour cat curfew, with comments provided regarding:

- No other pet is owner is expected to allow their animal to roam unattended
- All pets have a cost involved in maintaining them and it should be the pet owner's responsibility to meet these.
- Support the curfew as there are always cats in their yard, on the street footpath and near Boronia station.

The suggestions provided to support a cat curfew in Knox provided in these submissions were:

- Would Council consider building enclosed "play spaces" at certain part for cat owners to take their cats for different forms of exercise? This would develop the expectation that cats should not be wandering as well as teaching owners that cats can enjoy movement and challenge within a restricted space.
- Development of training for cats and owners to be under control – similar to dogs under effective control.
- Add a category in the local business directory specifically for this purpose – i.e. local tradesmen/businesses who can build these enclosures/fences.
- Establish partnerships with - or alliances with - tradesmen who have the necessary skills and who are willing to provide discounted services for Knox residents.
- Subsidise the cost of enclosures/ fence alterations for pensioners or low income earners.

Dogs off lead and Dog Parks

15 submissions received during the Phase 2 consultation period raised the topic of dogs off lead and dog parks in Knox (both in support and opposition), with comments provided regarding:

- Concern that dogs are allowed off-lead in most parks and reserves, due to the increase instance of dog attacks in Knox.
- Dogs should only be allowed off lead in fenced-off parks.
- Concerns of dogs not on lead or under effective control on walking paths and in parks – and the impact on public safety, and safety for other (smaller) dogs.
- Not enough patrols of dog parks and dog off-lead reserves and parks.
- Dogs should be able to walk and run in the park, provided they are on a lead or under adult supervision.
- Owners leaving tennis balls lying around in the Knox Dog park, and the bigger dogs often tear them apart, leaving smaller pieces scattered throughout the park and swallowed by other dogs.
- Dog care training is important so dogs are not panicked or distressed when they are left alone. Any training program promoted by Council should include a strong-off lead component with an aim to limiting owners reliance on leads to control their dog.
- Dog off leash areas where we can socialise with other dogs is important – as this gives them confidence, and they are able to better behave with other animals and people.
- Dog parks need to be big enough and designed to allow interaction and separate play areas (as small areas led to crowding and issues between dogs and owners).

Some of the direct quotes provided by respondents to the Phase 2 consultation regarding dogs off leash and dog parks include:

"I think that there should be more large space areas & green areas for people to walk their dogs. There are many areas in Knox dogs are not allowed to go even on lead. Small areas lead to crowding and issues between dogs & owners."

“After a dog has attacked a person or another animal, prosecution is not going to bring a dead child or animal back to life. Why are you putting the owners of dogs off leash, first? Having all dogs on leash is the safest thing to do. I have been attacked 3 times in 7 years.”

“We enjoy walking our dog off lead and voice controlled in the quarry, we would want this to continue”.

“Too many pet owners allow their dogs to roam free on the walking paths and parks. It’s become viral in Knox. This is a public safety issue of the highest priority. Loose dogs running up to people and jumping on them. Loose dogs approaching and not always being friendly to your dog on lead when walking. Loose dogs getting in the way of cyclists and potentially causing very serious collisions and injury to the cyclists whilst riding on paths. Dog owners need to be accountable for their dogs and their dogs behaviour when out in public.”



“Dogs that are properly off-lead trained and under complete vocal control of their owners are more compliant on lead and are not likely to be lost or get into fights or rush people if they do lose their lead. Sit and roll over are not effective tricks to keep a dog safe in a real world situation full of stimulation yet that is often the extent to which owners will train their dog.”

The suggestions provided regarding dogs off lead and dog play parks in Knox in these submissions were:

- There should be more regular patrols of dog parks.
- Maintain and update local dog parks.
- Dogs should only be allowed off-leash in designated off-leash areas, unless they have certification from obedience training that they have attended and have good recall control.
- Public spaces around wetlands, lakes and water-way areas around Harcrest Estate to be made dog on-lead areas to protect birds and wildlife.
- Would like the fences at Tormore Reserve joined to be fenced dog park, and to provide drinking fountains for dogs at Tormore Reserve.
- Introduce a rule that dog owners must not leave any balls or other objects in Council’s dog parks (due to the litter issue and impact of other dogs eating these items).
- Dogs need training when off lead so they are under complete vocal control, are more compliant on lead and not likely to get into fights or lost. Too many owners rely entirely on the lead as their only method to control their dog.
- Provide incentives (ie. More off-lead freedoms, registration discount with a different coloured tag) for dog owners who take up more rigorous training for their dogs – which will also encourage owners to keep their dog collars and tags on.
- The size of off lead dog parks need to be big enough to choose whether dogs interact with other dogs, or are a safe distance away to still be off-lead but separate play.
- Enforcement of collars or harnesses in off-lead areas – as even the best dogs occasionally get into arguments with other dogs, and having an easy way to grab and control any animal is essential.

Dog waste matters

8 submissions received during the Phase 2 consultation period raised the topic of dog waste (poo) matters (including owners not picking up the waste, bins and poo-bag dispensers), with comments provided regarding:

- Owners of dogs (and cats) should have to clean up after their pets when they are off their property
- More education and communication messaging about picking up after your dog
- Installation of bins and poo-bag dispensers in parks to encourage responsible disposal of dog waste, and reduce dumped litter
- Objection to using Council rates for signage and 'gifting' bags to dog owners to pick up after their dog
- *"The amount of left dog poo around the streets and parks is 10 times worse than it used to be. This is an area that needs to be addressed."*

The suggestions provided regarding dog waste matters in Knox in these submissions were:

- Education is required for those who do not pick up after their dogs – particularly for hygiene purposes
- Installation of bins (generally) in parks to allow for dog waste to be disposed of
- Installation of rubbish bins around the lake in Lakewood Estate, so bags with dog poo can be responsibly disposed of
- Provide doggy bag stands with bags in public places
- Page 32 of draft DAMP – delete incorrect sentence "Council currently provide poo bags via dispensers at Knox's dog play parks and will continue to do so" due to the discontinuation of this service by Council.
- Allow property owners to put up unobtrusive signs (ie. use old paling fence/ recycled material) about picking up after your dog.
- Advice of where to collect or purchase biodegradable pooch bags supplied.
- Communication of messaging via social media advertisements, on Council's website or with rates notices.

Dog barking issues

7 submissions received during the Phase 2 consultation period raised the topic of barking dogs (both in support and opposition), with comments provided regarding:

- Recognition that there are outside influences (ie. Other dogs, possums, foxes, owls, visitors to your home) that trigger dogs barking, beyond control of the dog owner
- Some neighbours just like to complain, wanting silence 24/7 – which is not possible
- Importance that dogs do not create a nuisance for neighbours and other residents
- Keeping dogs (and cats) indoors from 11pm to 7am – to remove the cause of noises at night, to apply the same rule that applies to neighbours playing music at night
- Dog barking numbers have dropped during the pandemic, showing nuisance dogs are due to socialisation issues
- Importance of addressing excessive barking urgently because by the time a complaint is submitted, the resident is quite exasperated – especially with lockdown and mental issues.

The suggestions provided regarding barking dogs in these submissions were:

- Amendments made to incorporate items that are outside an owner's control to stop our pets from barking, so that non-pet owners realise there is only so much we can do in a populated area to keep our pets quiet
- The onus on barking dogs should be on the dog owner, not on the neighbour
- Requirements that dogs be better trained to stop barking issues
- Letter of advice to the dog owner, and use of a sound recorder to prove the noise issue
- Training of dogs so barking does not become an issue when the dog is left alone
- Dogs (and cats) kept indoors from 11pm to 7am to reduce noise complaints

- Introduce a solution that meets the satisfaction of the dog owner and the neighbour such as:
 - Once voice recorder and log book submitted, immediately notify the offending party
 - Review of how many warnings are provided before fines are imposed
 - What is excessive barking – depends on the tolerance level of the neighbour/ affected party
 - Need to have the choice to remain anonymous to avoid repercussions/ backlash of reporting.

Pet registrations

5 submissions received during the Phase 2 consultation period raised the topic of pet registrations, with comments provided regarding:

- Registration of cats is unenforceable and will not address the problem
- Pet registration fees and refund arrangements
- Audit of unregistered pets
- The management and penalties for non-registration.

The suggestions provided regarding pet registrations in these submissions were:

- Keep registration fees as low as possible – and in cases where loss of employment happens thus forced onto Centrelink/job seeker payments, no fee should be charged in good faith & support
- Provide pro rata refunds of up to six months value on animal registrations where a pet has passed away – OR – have the option to transfer the pro rata refund to the owners property rates account should they own a property in Knox
- Follow-up of unregistered pets through an audit (suggested every 5-6 years), including the reasons why someone has not registered their animal
- Increase the level of management and penalties for non-compliance for non-registration (and for de-sexing and part-caring of dogs and cats).

Reuniting of lost pets

4 submissions received during the Phase 2 consultation period raised the topic of the reuniting of lost pets with their owners, with comments provided regarding:

- Support for vets to reunite lost pets (instead of Council animal management officers) – Note: this proposal is currently before the Victorian Parliament for debate as part of the *Domestic Animals Amendment (Reuniting Pets and Other Matters) Bill 2021*
- Review of the communication methods used to promote impounded/ lost animals
- Concern regarding the process of reuniting animals, given the resident's experience with their dog that escaped during a storm.

The suggestions provided regarding the reuniting of lost pets in these submissions were:

- If a pet cat or dog {that is micro-chipped} manages to get out of the back yard and picked up/taken to the local vet for identification – the Vet should call the owner direct for collection NOT call the pound (so the pet owner is not penalised with massive collection charges/fines)
- Look at engaging other social media streams to promote impounded animals, as Facebook and other algorithms can preclude people from seeing content. Weekly or monthly email or SMS communication to raise resident's awareness of this.

De-sexing and microchipping of cats and dogs

4 submissions received during the Phase 2 consultation period raised the topic of the de-sexing and microchipping of cats and dogs, with comments provided regarding:

- Requirement of de-sexing and microchipping of all cats and dogs
- Ways to support pet owners to access their pet's microchip and contact details
- Subsidies and promotion of pet de-sexing programs.

The suggestions provided regarding pet de-sexing and microchipping in these submissions were:

- Consider adding Local Council registration number to microchip information, as plastic registration tags get lost very easily (especially with breakaway collars, which are in the animal's best interests)
- Provide an engravable, lifelong tag that has the registration number on one side, so that the owners name and contact phone number can be added to the other side
- Subsidise de-sexing and microchipping for all animals within Knox, to encourage further registrations and responsible pet ownership
- Promotion of the free cat de-sexing program being offered by Animal Aid (currently)
- Provide links to the various microchipping providers/ platforms the Council's portal, so that owners can better manage their pet's information (update contact details) – as well as being useful for pet owners to have consolidated place to access pet information (even if it's a link to a third-party site)
- Mandate that all pets within Knox be de-sexed – there is no justification for having whole animals in this day and age.
- When any animal that ends up in the pound, both cats (as proposed) and dogs should have microchipping as a necessity before they are released to their owners.

Animal cruelty and welfare

4 submissions received during the Phase 2 consultation period raised the topic of the animal cruelty and welfare, with comments provided regarding:

- Limitation and/or stricter conditions on loaning cat traps to the public, to ensure the welfare of cats - *"Cat traps should never be loaned to private citizens as Knox council cannot guarantee that the cat or any other animal that is captured will be treated humanely and provided to council for processing. The council is complicit if an unsavory character borrows a trap and tortures or kill a cat or other animal."*
- Cat enclosure minimum size requirements
- Partnering with non-kill animal shelters, to promote the rehoming of impounded or lost animals
- Tougher penalties/ consequences for those who break rules/ mistreat animals.

The suggestions provided regarding animal cruelty and welfare matters in these submissions were:

- Introducing requirements on the size and height of cat enclosures, to ensure they are big enough for cats to adequately exercise, be shaded/ protected from weather and do not cause welfare issues for cats
- Establish the motivation for requesting a cat cage, to ensure no cruelty towards cats
- Work with existing non-kill shelters (e.g. the Cat Corner) for the cats who are impounded and not reclaimed
- Owners that continue to break the rules should have the pets taken away and re-homed, and a black flag put against their name so they are not allowed to own a pet again anywhere in Victoria or Australia
- Cease allowing cat traps to be loaned to the public.

Other matters regarding cats and dogs

The other matters raised in the submissions received during the Phase 2 consultation period raised a range of other matters regarding the keeping of cats and dogs in Knox such as:

- Concern that Animal Aid Coldstream is too far away for Knox residents to reclaim their pets
- Support for the Pet companion program for seniors – *“the program for senior citizens is good. Pets can be such a joy to someone who hasn’t anybody else”*
- Improvements in the communication methods with pet owners, and promotion of Pets in the Park.
- Responsible pet ownership testing/ screening and incentives, including breed considerations
- Provision of further information about the impact of domestic violence and pets
- Compliments on the draft DAMP - *“Thank you for the opportunity to read through the Domestic Animal Management Plan draft. I found it to be very informative, particularly the statistics provided. Obviously the numbers have been impacted greatly by COVID leading to more people being home so much. I think this is such a vital management plan for all suburbs to educate and promote awareness and responsibility.”*
- Enforcement and dog attack/ seizure process suggestions.

The other suggestions provided regarding keeping of cats and dogs in these submissions were:

- Introduce a test/ screen of the rules of keeping cats and dogs in Knox – so owners know what is expected (including guidance of where to go for help to stop owners creating pests instead of pets)
- Regulations before attaining a pet – to avoid pets being neglected or dumped once they are no longer cute and cuddly.
- Unmarked cars for rangers to undertake after-hour patrols for barking dogs, cats out at night, etc (including use of tranquilliser guns by officers)
- Harsher penalties for pet owners, so effected neighbours don’t poison or kill pets when it’s not their fault if they have not been looked after or trained properly
- Huskies and similar breeds are not urban house block animals and not a good choice for the well-being of the pet.
- Better promotion of Council’s Pets in the Park event – *“I have lived in this Council Area for 22 years and never have I witnessed a sign, a notice or any mention of Pets in the Park”*
- Review of communication methods, with news that needs to go to all registered pet owners to be sent by email or letter. There are those in the community who do not have the access or ability to use email, and those who choose to avoid social media like Facebook and Instagram, etc.
- Introduction of an incentive (ie. Waived registration, voucher for de-sexing and annual vaccinations) for those who are looking after semi-owned cats (feeding, providing shelter and temporary accommodation)
- Amend the draft DAMP to include additional information regarding the impact of domestic violence and pets – *“Seventy per cent of women fleeing domestic violence also report pet abuse, and it’s another reason many victims delay leaving. They fear the animal who has provided love and support when they need it most will be harmed.”* <https://www.abc.net.au/everyday/keeping-your-pet-safe-when-escaping-domestic-violence/11751300>
- Extension of pet discounts beyond concession card holder – to those who are employed but living in poverty
- Existing Pet companionship program for Knox residents offered by Bridges Connected Communities
- More information to be provided regarding Council’s seizure orders and the process regarding seizure of dogs involved in dog attacks.

Animal Justice Party submission

A large submission was provided by the Animal Justice Party (AJP) in late September 2021, which was not specific to the Knox Council animal management services or draft DAMP. The timing of the receipt of this submission was considerably after the closure of the phase 1 consultation period (2nd August), that provided the ideas and suggestions included in the draft 2021-2025 DAMP. The submission did not reference or review Knox Council's current 2017-2021 DAMP or the draft 2021-2025 DAMP, and was a listing of recommendations that they would like to see adopted statewide/ by all Councils.

The AJP submission outlined 54 recommendations, with the following recommendations already being adopted/ provided by Knox Council's current animal management services:

5. Ensure data collection is more detailed and specific, including separate intake/outcome data for cats, kittens, dogs and puppies; and for "owner"-surrendered, stray, impounded/seized animals and animals transferred from/to another facility.
7. Express each outcome as both number and percentage of total animals.
14. Adopt an industry-recommended management software to help with the day-to-day management of shelters.
18. Offer de-sexing vouchers through the MAV/AVA and widen the eligibility criteria.
20. Record all cats seized and their outcome; every cat and kitten should be recorded and reported, regardless of their age or circumstance.
22. Promote incentives directly to households through mail-outs or door-knocking, and not just on social media.
26. Implement initiatives aimed at increasing animal registrations based on research and analysis
27. Identify obstacles that hinder animal registration such as fees, mandatory de-sexing, mandatory curfew/containment, limit of animals per household.
28. Construct a 24-hour holding area, if one does not already exist, to increase time for animals to be collected when they have been readily identified. Consider using volunteers to help run it.
29. Install Geographic Information System (GIS) software to record, map and analyse animal incident data.
30. Publish all impounded animals on social media or the council website. Provide clear photographs, found location, and other information, on social media or websites (see, for example, <https://www.facebook.com/centralgoldfields.rehoming/>)
32. Provide every ranger with a microchip scanner and access to databases in their vehicle.
34. Recognise animals as victims of family and domestic violence.
35. Educate and train council officers to be aware that animals are victims of family and domestic violence, and to be alert and empathetic to this possibility; social and support workers and animal management teams should complete the Animal-3Rs training developed by EDVOS and the University of Melbourne
38. Offer assistance with transport of animals (e.g., carriers, drivers), including larger animals like horses.
41. Balance the needs of dogs and their companion people with those in the community who may not like dogs, by providing areas where dogs are welcome, including shopping precincts, such as Chapel St in South Yarra, and areas where dogs are not permitted.
42. Advocate for more off-lead areas (with dogs under effective control) so that dogs are not concentrated in small areas.

44. Provide resources on being a responsible dog guardian, e.g. brochures, webpage, videos
45. Provide an interactive website or app (along the lines of apps like Playground Finder) for locating dog-friendly and/or off-lead areas
46. Consult with dog guardians and experts in the community to develop appropriate off-lead areas.
48. Respond swiftly to reports of dog-related incidents, such as aggression or attacks.
50. Advise residents to attend a qualified dog trainer or puppy pre-school that uses positive reinforcement training techniques after eight weeks of age, to provide education about training on health issues, feeding, and how to live with dogs safely. This should include how to meet other dogs both on and off lead.
51. Provide incentives for residents to undertake training, such as reduced registration fees in the first year.

Other recommendations included in the AJP submission (not in place or fully adopted by Knox Council) are:

1. Extend the term ‘companion animal’ beyond its usual association with cats and dogs to include any animal under our care and include these animals in the DAMP.
2. Adopt an integrated approach which includes all companion animals in the community. This will enable councils to understand and address companion animal management issues in a more effective and complete manner, and will create opportunities for innovation.
3. Design and implement programs, policy and research based on a One Health approach that recognises that the health of people is closely connected to the health of animals and our shared environment.
4. Provide species-specific education on the proper care of companion animals (including appropriate housing, exercise and stimulation), to prevent cruelty and neglect.
6. Collate and publish monthly outcome data for all animals on Council website within one month of the end of each month, in their Annual Report, and on the “Know Your Council” website, irrespective of whether the council runs its own pound or outsources this to a contractor.
8. Express ‘euthanasia’ figures as a percentage of the unclaimed animals; do not include reclaimed animals as it masks and diminishes the impact of euthanasia.
9. Increase educational training for officers in the use of correct definitions and assessment of animals
10. Develop and implement a scientifically-based, Best Practice Euthanasia Policy and Procedure for council-run pounds and contractors
11. Establish KPIs to reduce killing in all contracts with third-party providers.
12. Include urban stray and free-living (‘feral’) cats in all statistic
13. Adopt recommendations from latest research into strategies to achieve zero euthanasia of healthy and treatable animals in shelters and pounds.
15. Increase revenue to assist councils to implement these changes.
16. Replace mandatory de-sexing of cats with free (or at least more affordable) de-sexing, particularly in high cat intake/low socioeconomic areas.
17. Provide carriers/transport to and from clinics for de-sexing programs in targeted, low-socioeconomic areas.
19. Collaborate with local veterinary clinics to encourage Early Age De-sexing and cheaper de-sexing. Cats can safely be de-sexed at 12 weeks of age, which stops that first “surprise” litter at four month

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21. Work with people who care for cats, whether owned or semi-owned.
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23. Adopt a research-based, best practice approach to microchipping and registration. Such practice reduces impoundments and euthanasia rates.
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24. Increase identification and reuniting rates through free microchipping days; proper training of animal management staff, particularly to become certified, microchip implanters; online registration for entering and updating information; no release fee for microchipped animals; and incentives to encourage registration and microchipping.
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25. Lobby for a single industry-integrated microchip and registration database.
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31. Develop section 84Y agreements with all interested veterinary clinics and registered animal rescue organisations and ensure the application process is simple. Allow veterinary clinics and rescue groups/organisations with an s84Y to reunite animals with their guardians directly.
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33. Reunite any microchipped/registered animal without fee at least three times per year with appropriate scaled penalties for repeat offenders beyond this.
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36. Increase coverage of family and domestic violence refuges, especially those that also shelter dependent children and animals, and provide secure funding.
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37. Provide crisis shelter/accommodation and/or veterinary treatment for animals who have been in a FDV situation and who cannot be accommodated with their family.
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39. Be empathetic in cases of FDV and help to facilitate the transfer of registration away from perpetrators of violence to those who have the animal's best interests in mind; e.g., animals are often registered in the name of an abuser and many councils will not transfer "ownership" without the permission of the current "owner". Councils could waive this requirement in FDV cases.
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40. Improve resources on council websites so that people can explore their options to support their companion animals as part of a plan to leave a situation of family or domestic violence
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43. Plan and develop council areas with dogs in mind and to be dog-friendly; provide appropriate access to water, and adequate facilities to dispose of dog waste, including dog poo bags and rubbish bins.
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47. Avoid being too restrictive about dogs on lead. For example, residents should be able to exercise a degree of common sense about letting their dog off lead on beaches or in parks during times when no one is around
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49. Promote the socialisation of puppies during their critical socialisation period of 3 to 14 weeks of age.
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52. Encourage ongoing socialisation of dogs and exposure to all types of dogs, situations and people.
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53. Encourage the organisation of social groups such as 'puppy parties' for young dogs.
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54. Provide education sessions for people before they decide to share their life with a dog so that they can make an informed decision, have realistic expectations and begin to understand dogs.
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